

Senate Bill

236

House Judiciary Committee

State of Montana

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee my name is Richard Meeker, and I reside in Helena Montana

When I retired from the court system several years ago I gave no thoughts of ever again appearing before a legislative committee offering testimony on a proposed piece of legislation.

However, I appear before you now in support of the above listed piece of legislation. I have worked in the Youth Court System for 34 years. Thirty two for those years I worked in the State of Montana, serving for 25 years as Chief Probation Officer for the first judicial dist. Now I have no dog in this fight, by that I mean to say that I am not employed nor am I a member of any agency or organization that either supports or opposes this legislation. I am simply a former practitioner.

I am here today in support of Senate bill 236 and in doing so oppose the death penalty. I oppose the death penalty for the following reasons. It is often touted that the death penalty offers a deterrent to potential violent offenders from committing violent crimes. This assumption is simply wrong. During my tenure with the court system I dealt with a half of dozen murders as well as several violent crimes where in the victim almost died. I can assure you that at no time prior to the offense did the offender ever consider the consequences of his actions, let alone that he might face the death penalty. The death penalty does not deter the violent offender. Finally it is often assumed that the survivor/family members or friends of the victim can only gain closure to this most unfortunate life event through the death of the offender. Though we enjoy the finest legal system in the world the system continually re-victimizes the survivors from the initial investigation through the trial, and the long appeals process. The survivors are force to continue to relive the pain, anger and sadness of the original crime. They never rest.

Since it does not deter, it puts victims through years of revictimization it is an unwise policy. With no clear benefits, I have concluded that the death penalty is wrong, and is curial and unusual punishment not worthy of a civilized society. Lets help law enforcement by putting our resources to reduce violence and aid victims.

Dick Meeker